

Where I Land Philosophically

By Dan Jensen (2023)

(In order to fully benefit from this essay, I recommend reading through my “works for beginners” first. They can be found on my website.)

In this essay, I want to briefly give to any of my interested readers a quick overview of where I land philosophically. I believe that philosophy is extremely important. I do not believe that either apologetics or theology can be done properly without it. With that made very clear, I do not feel called to be a philosopher. I have read philosophy extensively, but I do not feel that it is my calling to interact with that subject all that much other than as it pertains to my apologetic and theological work. Therefore, while I will not be writing any works of a purely philosophical nature, one should understand what my philosophical presuppositions are at all times when reading my works, especially those who seek to fully digest my more in-depth works.

My philosophy is, for the most part, Thomistic and that of Scottish Common Sense Realism (SCSR). Not surprisingly, the two philosophers that I am most in line with by far are Aquinas and Reid. I do not say what I am about to say to be arrogant or offensive. That is genuinely not my heart. At the same time, it rather irritates me that so much of the current American church has made winsomeness such an idol that we are no longer allowed to call a spade a spade. I refuse to play this game no matter how much it may turn many in the church off to my writings. I am not seeking to be popular. At all times, my passion is for the truth. With all of that said, I must say that when one reads Aquinas and Reid, especially the former, one is immediately struck by the fact that he or she is in the presence of greatness. And when one reads Hume and Foucault, as just two key examples, one is equally struck by the fact that he or she is in the presence of unvarnished idiocy, disingenuousness, and sophistry.

Especially with Aquinas, one cannot help but be floored by the sheer brilliance. And not the kind of brilliance that gets so often loosely labeled as such in our day. But true brilliance. I am always sincerely humbled whenever I read Aquinas, especially the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. It is such a reminder that even though I come from a very smart, logical, and educated family, I am truly nothing in the big scheme of things. My intellect could never ever come close to holding a candle to that of the great doctor.

It sickens me that so many in the Reformed world are so against Aquinas when most of them have plainly not even read him. And that is not just my judgmental assessment. Sproul often talked about how he suspected this very same thing. He is routinely misrepresented and misunderstood within my community. This is not ok as we rightfully often chastise our opponents, both within and outside of the church, for misrepresenting our camp. This hypocrisy is very unfortunate.

Reid is often ignored and downplayed in philosophical circles and beyond because he so forcefully and eloquently destroys so many of the pet positions of the elites in our ever growing and advancing liberal culture. I cannot tell you how many times I have read something by a historian, scientist, or political analyst that makes some short and utterly lame sweeping dismissal of the antiquated nature of Reid and/or SCSR. And then I must force myself to go on reading knowing full well that at every point he or she will argue using the very presuppositions that Reid correctly makes clear all people use all of the time. Further, they will fail to argue in any way, shape, or form in a manner that is in accord with Hume. This blatant ignorance and inconsistency is ubiquitous among the secular writers of our age.

I do not agree with either Aquinas or Reid on everything philosophically. I especially have many disagreements with Aquinas theologically. Despite being an excellent theologian overall, he was a far better philosopher and apologist. His theology is far too beholden to the medieval Catholic church and I believe he knew that deep down. For instance, many times in the *Summa Theologica* he will basically subtly admit that he

cannot make a Scriptural case for the doctrine he is defending and will thus say that the church says it is so, and the church cannot err, hence the doctrine is proved.

My Catholic friends can say all they want, “Well duh, he wasn’t Protestant!” But, this fails to read Aquinas on his own terms and seeks to impose on him later Tridentine views. Aquinas at the beginning of the *Summa* makes it clear that all doctrines of the faith must come from the Scriptures. Therefore, he is very inconsistent here. Now, he of course would argue that he is not because he has proved the infallibility of the church. In fact, in many of the instances I just described above, he will reiterate his attempted biblical defense of the infallibility of the church. The problem is that he never really answers how the church came to these conclusions from Scripture when by his own admission all doctrines must come from the Bible. Hence, he is not nearly the theologian that Luther or Calvin were to the church.

Many, especially many of my fellow Reformed brethren, will retort that one cannot have the philosophy of Aquinas while holding to the theology of Luther and Calvin. Nonsense. This again only shows how little most of those making this assertion have actually read of Aquinas. Aquinas was often very inconsistent theologically for the very reasons I just stated in the previous paragraph. And Luther and Calvin were often very inconsistent theologically because they so often lambast reason and yet all of their theological argumentation is based on the presupposition of reason. I know that many will say that I have just given a very truncated version of Luther and Calvin on reason. And that is certainly true. I am not saying that they denied the use of reason altogether. They most certainly did not. But, in my strong estimation, they so often tried to downplay and qualify its role in theology that they were in the end rarely ever able to live this out consistently in their works. They often go well beyond the basic meaning of the texts and use elaborate (even if rarely presented in that way) syllogisms to come to their doctrinal conclusions. These conclusions, especially in the case of Calvin, are usually correct in my opinion. That does not change the fact that the method behind many of these conclusions is not always in keeping with much of what they say about reason.

Thus, I am convinced that Old Princeton did a masterful job, for the most part, of rightly synthesizing the philosophy of Aquinas and (especially) Reid with the theology of Luther and (especially) Calvin. Gerstner and Sproul sought to carry on that synthesis. And this is precisely where I land for the most part as well. Therefore, this should give my more well-read readers a strong idea of how to interpret me in most cases. And where there is some gray as I do not hold to everything Aquinas or Reid said philosophically, please email me and I am happy to clarify. My email can be found on my website and you have my full permission to publish or post anything from our correspondence.

For those new to philosophy and/or theology, I recommend beginning with part 2 of my *A False Kind of Christianity*, then reading the philosophical and apologetic works of Sproul, and then diving into Aquinas and Reid themselves. The works of Hodge, Warfield, and to a lesser degree Geisler, will all be helpful to you as well.